

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4451

INFO AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

HQ, USSOUTHCOM, SCJ2

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SANTIAGO FOR ASST. SECRETARY TODMAN

E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, SHUM, UY

SUBJ: URUGUAY ANNOUNCES NATIONAL ELECTIONS FOR 1981

REF: A) 76 MONTEVIDEO A-61 B) 76 MONTEVIDEO 2222

C) 76 MONTEVIDEO 3254 D) 76 MONTEVIDEO 3438

E) 76 MONTEVIDEO 4142 F) MONTEVIDEO 3059 (DTG 100244Z AUG77)

1. SUMMARY. THE GOU FORMALLY ANNOUNCED AUGUST 9 THAT NATIONAL ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD IN NOVEMBER 1981, TEN YEARS AFTER THE LAST ELECTIONS FOR NATIONAL AND LOCAL POLITICAL LEADERS. ALTHOUGH PREVIOUS STATEMENTS TO THE EFFECT HAD BEEN MADE BY HIGH-LEVEL GOU OFFICIALS, THIS COMMUNIQUE IS THE FIRST FORMAL GOU COMMITMENT MADE TO AN ELECTION TIMETABLE. THE OFFICIAL COMMUNIQUE PROVIDES NO DETAILS ON THE FORM THE ELECTIONS WILL TAKE EXCEPT THAT "TRADITIONAL PARTIES" WILL PARTICIPATE AND THAT THERE WILL BE UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE. END SUMMARY.

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2. FOLLOWING THE RETURN OF URUGUAY'S MILITARY HIGH COMMAND FROM A FOUR-DAY CONCLAVE AT SANTA TERESA, THE GOVERNMENT ISSUED THE FOLLOWING COMMUNIQUE ON THE EVENING OF AUGUST 9:

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

"THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC, IN SESSION WITH THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS AND THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL, TODAY HAS DECIDED TO APPROVE THE PROPOSITION OF THE COMMANDERS-IN-CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES AS FOLLOWS:

(1) THAT NATIONAL ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD IN NOVEMBER 1981; CERTAIN REGULATORY CONDITIONS PROVIDING FOR THIS AND THE FUTURE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF THE COUNTRY WILL BE ESTABLISHED BEGINNING IN 1980 BASED ON UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE AND THE PARTICIPATION OF THE TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES, THEREBY RATIFYING THE PRONOUNCEMENT ON THIS MATTER PREVIOUSLY MADE BY THE NATIONAL AUTHORITIES.

(2) TO EMPHASIZE THE EFFORTS OF THE GOVERNMENT TO EFFECT AND CONSOLIDATE DEVELOPMENT IN THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FIELDS, FOR THE PURPOSE OF PROVIDING FOR THE DEFINITIVE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF A NEW URUGUAY IN THE BEST OF CONDITIONS.

(3) UNTIL THAT TIME, THIS DECISION SHOULD NOT BE INTERPRETED IN SUCH A WAY AS TO EXCITE EXCESSIVE AND INOPPORTUNE POLITICAL ACTIVITIES, BUT RATHER ON THE CONTRARY, THE GOVERNMENT ENCOURAGES THE CITIZENRY TO INCREASE ITS CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS ASSURING THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE NATION IN SUCH A WAY THAT THE INSTITUTIONAL RESTORATION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IN PROGRESS MAY BE CARRIED OUT IN ORDER TO ASSURE A PROMISING FUTURE FOR THE DESTINY OF THE NATION, PRESERVING IT FROM SUBVERSION AND FROM PREVIOUS POLITICAL PRACTICES WHICH HAVE NOW BEEN OVERCOME." END UNCLASSIFIED

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3. THE QUESTION OF WHEN NATIONAL ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD BEGAN AS THE TERM OF OFFICE OF THE CONSTITUTIONALLY-ELECTED PRESIDENT, JUAN MARIA BORDABERRY, WAS DRAWING TO A CLOSE IN 1976. ACCORDING TO CHAPTER II, ARTICLE 77 OF THE 1967 CONSTITUTION, ELECTIONS FOR THE PRESIDENT, VICE PRESIDENT, LEGISLATURE AND OTHER OFFICIALS WOULD NORMALLY HAVE BEEN HELD NOVEMBER 28, 1976. HOWEVER, A CONTROVERSY BETWEEN PRESIDENT BORDABERRY AND THE MILITARY ERUPTED OVER THE IMMEDIATE POLITICAL COURSE THE NATION WOULD TAKE.

4. NO SERIOUS OBSERVERS EXPECTED NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN 1976. IN FACT, BORDABERRY HIMSELF ARGUED AGAINST HOLDING THE ELECTIONS AND WENT FURTHER BY ARGUING THAT ELECTION OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS WAS NO LONGER A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE FOR URUGUAY (REF A). THE MILITARY, HOWEVER, NEVER PUBLICLY

ENDORSED A POLICY WHEREBY POLITICAL PARTIES AND DIRECT ELECTIONS WOULD BE RULED OUT FOREVER. RATHER, THEY OPTED FOR THE REMOVAL OF BORDABERRY AND THE INSTALLATION OF A FIGUREHEAD PRESIDENT FOR A FIVE-YEAR TERM, AFTER A THREE-MONTH INTERVAL WHEN AN INTERIM PRESIDENT HELD OFFICE.

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5. THE FIRST ACT OF THE POST-BORDABERRY GOVERNMENT WAS TO APPROVE INSTITUTIONAL ACT NO 1 (REF B), WHICH SUSPENDED INDEFINITELY CONVOCAION OF THE ELECTIONS SLATED FOR NOVEMBER 1976. SHORTLY THEREAFTER, APARICIO MENDEZ WAS NAMED PRESIDENT FOR A FIVE-YEAR TERM, BEGINNING SEPTEMBER 1, 1976. INSTITUTIONAL ACT NO. 4 THEN DEPRIVED A WIDE SPECTRUM OF URUGUAYANS OF THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES (REF C). AT THE SAME TIME TIME MENDEZ GAVE LIP SERVICE TO THE EVENTUAL TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY (REF D).

6 THE NEXT WORD ON THE SUBJECT WAS A PRESS CONFERENCE STATEMENT BY ARMY CINC VADORA (OCTOBER 28, 1976) THAT THE PEOPLE WOULD HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO VOTE ON A SINGLE CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT IN 1981 (REF E). NOW, THE AUGUST 9 COMMUNIQUE HAS GIVEN THE OFFICIAL STAMP OF APPROVAL FOR NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN 1981, TEN YEARS AFTER THE LAST NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN URUGUAY. MANY CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS, HOWEVER,

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REMAIN TO BE DEFINED.

7. NO INDICATION IS GIVEN IN THE COMMUNIQUE AS TO WHAT "TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES" WILL BE ALLOWED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE 1981 ELECTIONS. HOWEVER, THE GOVERNMENT HAD PREVIOUSLY INDICATED THAT, IN USING THIS TERM, IT MEANS ONLY THE BLANCO COLORADO PARTIES, WHILE "MARXIST PARTIES" WILL BE EXCLUDED FROM THE PROCESS OF POLITICAL NORMALIZATION. IDEAS ENUNCIATED BY THE GOVERNMENT SINCE THE REMOVAL OF BORDABERRY HAVE INDICATED THAT THE BLANCO AND COLORADO PARTIES WOULD BE EXPECTED TO PRESENT A JOINT CANDIDATE IN A FUTURE ELECTION. AGAIN, THIS QUESTION REMAINS UNDEFINED, ALTHOUGH THERE IS SOME SPECULATION THAT THERE MIGHT WELL BE A CANDIDATE FROM EACH OF THE TWO PARTIES IN 1981.

8. THE COMMUNIQUE'S USE OF THE FAMILIAR WORDS "PRESERVING (URUGUAY) FROM SUBVERSION AND FROM PREVIOUS POLITICAL PRACTICES THAT HAVE NOW BEEN OVERCOME" SIGNALS NO CHANGE IN THE GOVERNMENT AND MILITARY'S DEEP-SEATED BELIEF THAT NO RETURN TO THE POLITICAL USAGES AND CONDITIONS OF THE PAST IS PERMISSIBLE. THUS, ANY-HOPES THAT THE GOVERNMENT AND MILITARY WILL PERMIT A FULL RETURN TO URUGUAY'S PAST POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IN 1981 MUST BE VIEWED WITH CAUTION.

9. THEREFORE, ALTHOUGH THE GOU COMMUNIQUE REPRESENTS A STEP FORWARD, IT IS A TENTATIVE AND WLL-HEDGED ONE. ITS TIMING MAY HAVE SOME RELATION TO THE ANTICIPATED PRESSURES OF THE TODMAN VISIT. HOWEVER, ITS SUBSTANCE WOULD APPEAR TO SPRING FROM WHAT WE SENSE AS A GROWING CONVICTION IN GOVERNMENT CIRCLES (BOTH CIVILIAN AND MILITARY), THAT TO ENSURE AN ORDERLY RETURN TO ELECTED GOVERNMENT (HOWEVER DEFINED), THE PROCESS MUST BE SET SERIOUSLY IN MOTION SOON. REGARDLESS OF THE REASONS FOR EITHER TIMING OR SUBSTANCE,

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THE GOU HAS IN ANY EVENT NOW MET ITS 1976 COMMITMENT TO BEGIN THE PATH BACK TO SOME FORM OF PARTICIPATORY GOVERNMENT IN 1981.

10. PRESS COMMENT AND REACTION FROM SOURCES WILL BE REPORTED SUBSEQUENTLY.

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